

Involving people in NHS England’s procurement processes:

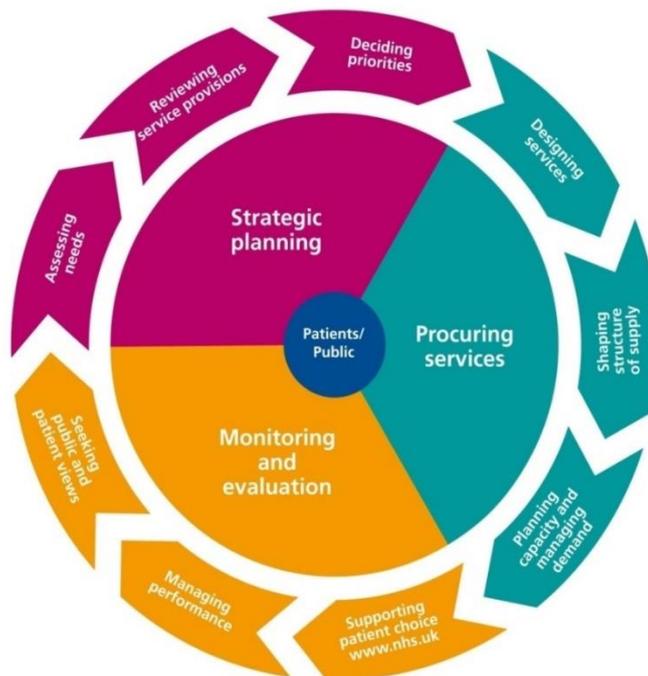
An advice note for Commissioners

NHS England’s requirement to involve people in commissioning

NHS England has a legal duty to make sure that participation is part of the work they do in planning and buying certain services, including:

- Primary care - GP, dental, pharmacy and optometry,
- Specialised services - for example for rare conditions,
- Public health.

The NHS’s own patient and public involvement guidance advises that people are involved early on and throughout the commissioning cycle to ensure the engagement is meaningful and can effectively influence service design.



Courtesy of The NHS Information Centre for health and social care. Full diagram available at: www.ic.nhs.uk/commissioning

Wessex Voices would support this view because if people are meaningfully involved in planning and commissioning, services will better meet local needs. Our toolkit provides useful advice, guidance and tools on how to do this.

Advice about involving people in a procurement process specifically

A procurement process is usually a very technical and prescriptive process. It is therefore important that commissioners are very clear about what role people can play in these processes and to support them through it.

Our advice would be to:

a. Plan for and define the purpose and role people can play in procurements

Commissioners should plan their engagement activity early. From the outset be clear about why you want to involve people, what their role is, what you hope to learn from their involvement. Also think about how you are going to support them through this technical process. This will help you identify what timeframes and resources you need to carry out this work.

People could:

- Comment on the service specifications
- Help develop the criteria for the tendering and bidding process
- Take part in a panel in the appraising bids

Top tip: Focus people's roles on developing and evaluating the patient experience elements of the process. (See Appendix 1 **Wessex Voices Toolkit page 9**).

b. Engage early

If you have been working with patients to inform the design and specification of the service they may be willing to work with you on your procurement. Early engagement will be more meaningful, and on a practical note will also allow you to build sustainable relationships and make engagement at all stages easier.

c. Be clear about expectations and time commitments

Be clear about expectations and timelines for those you involve. For example, that their role will be advisory rather than taking business critical decisions. Make sure they are aware of the level of influence they have over the decisions to be made. Be clear that you need people to think like a citizen rather than a user of a specific NHS service in a particular area so they can give a balanced view point.

Be specific about the time commitment required. If people are to be involved then they need to be aware that meetings will be set to meet specified points in the procurement process, which may take place during working hours with little flexibility to accommodate different people's availability. This needs to be clear, so that people can make a judgement about whether they have the time and availability to be involved.

Advertise the role with the project timeline and what you need people to do. Create a role description, ask people to fill in a simple application to say why they are interested in getting involved, what experience they will bring and what support they might need. Think about whether they will need to have access to a computer or whether you can support them if they haven't.

Ask people to consider if there may be a conflict of interest with any other activities they are involved in.

d. Support people through the process

It is more than likely that people will need support to understand the procurement process, their role in it and the boundaries of their influence. Consider whether you need to offer training to them and certainly plan to provide thorough briefings.

You may need to reiterate and clarify these points throughout the process. Ask people as you go along if you can clarify and support them with anything.

e. Finish the process properly

Whilst you may think awarding the tender is the end of the process, the people you have involved will want to understand how they influenced the final decision. Feedback and thank them. They will be much more willing to get involved in future.

Also make sure you evaluate how people felt about being involved and share lessons learnt with colleagues. This will make it all the better for others next time.

Don't forget to involve people in monitoring the service you have just procured together.

A final thought

Remember this process is not for everyone but there should be plenty of opportunities for people to get involved in other parts of commissioning. Encourage people to do this and stay in touch.

Support available from Wessex Voices

- Our Wessex Voices Toolkit and other resources
- Advice and guidance through our Steering Group and Project Manager
- By speak to your Local Healthwatch
- Signposting to trainers who can support people with procurement processes

For more information contact: Sue Newell, Wessex Voices Project Manager on sue.newell@helpandcare.org.uk or 07595 424198 or visit www.wessexvoices.org.

Appendix 1: Taken from Wessex Voices Toolkit page 9

Step 1

Hold focus groups or discussions with service users. You can test whether the specification you have written reflects the needs of patients as identified through your research and planning and also any conversations you may have had in the design phase.

TOP TIP - keep focus groups focussed! Share the specification in advance so people have time to read it and have 3 or 4 specific questions you want to ask. Think about recognising peoples' time with an incentive.

Step 2

Use the focus groups to agree what KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to include that relate to service quality.

TOP TIP - KPIs that specifically include how the service meets the needs of service users and how it learns through patient experience and patient feedback to improve its service can be agreed at this point.

Step 3

Have a 'patient perspective' on the procurement panel.

TOP TIP - work with this person to agree weightings and assessment criteria. Be sure that any individual involved in the procurement panel receives training or mentoring so that they can fully participate and understand their role in providing a patient perspective rather than a personal or individual opinion.

Step 4

You could also consider asking bidders to present to a group of patients on the day. Working with a local partner such as Healthwatch or a voluntary organisation will be the easiest way to do this.

TOP TIP - set a task for bidders, to present or work with a group of patients, set criteria for the bidders to meet and make sure the group know what these are. Meet with the group after they have met and worked with bidders to receive feedback against the criteria.